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ABSTRACT

As child care becomes an increasingly important public policy issue on the national level, there is emerging concern about Georgia's readiness to meet the needs of its children in care. This study documented the state of child care in Georgia in comparison to other states, to national averages, and to national standards. A group of 12 comparison states were selected based on geographic proximity, similar population size, previous application in national child care studies and databases, and economic characteristics. Data were collected through several national government databases and through private and state agencies or programs engaged in monitoring child care issues. Findings were categorized in the areas of state demographic information, condition of state child care systems, state child care spending, child care costs, and child care quality. Among the findings are the following: (1) Georgia women exceed the national average in workforce participation, increasing demand for child care; (2) Georgia lags significantly behind the other states in providing child care subsidies to families whose children are at highest risk of poor outcomes and in setting standards to improve quality; (3) with 25% of Georgia children living in poverty, the cost of high quality care would be prohibitive for families even if it were widely available; and (4) Georgia ranks poorly on measures of child care quality, particularly on child to staff ratios, although the state performs relatively well in the area of wages for child care workers. (A summary of results and a delineation of data sources are appended. Contains 21 endnotes.) (KB)

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REGIONAL CHILD CARE TRENDS: COMPARING GEORGIA TO ITS NEIGHBORS

Lauren Waits, Malina Monaco, Lisa Beck, Jennifer Edwards

September 28, 2001

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The typical family structure in America is changing. Over the past 30 years it has become increasingly common for unmarried women to bear and raise children, for couples to divorce, for single fathers to raise children, and for both married and unmarried women to work. In fact, twice as many mothers work today as twenty years ago. Most children growing up in American families now enter some form of child care at a very early age. However, our child care system has not kept pace with these important social trends, and current child care options are woefully inadequate to meet both children's and parents' needs.

National trends are reflected in Georgia, both in terms of the changing social environment and in the urgent need for improved child care options. However, there are some important differences. Georgia women exceed the national average in workforce participation, creating an even greater need for child care. 64% of Georgia mothers whose children are less than six years old work outside the home compared to a national average of 60%, and this percentage increases to 77% for mothers whose children are between six and seventeen years of age.[i] Georgia has the highest proportion of young children of any Southeastern state. Furthermore, Georgia's population is growing at a rapid rate and the total number of children needing care can only be expected to increase in coming years.

While demand is high and growing, Georgia lags significantly behind other states in providing child care subsidies to families whose children are at highest risk of poor outcomes, and in setting standards that would improve the quality of child care services. It has been estimated that Georgia provides subsidies to only 8% of low income children in the state. Georgia's child care inspectors have some of the highest caseloads in the South. Furthermore, while the majority of child care dollars available to support families in Georgia come from the federal government, Georgia does not even draw down the maximum available funds.

The Atlanta metro area dominates in population growth and leads in new demand for child care services but Georgia's large rural area also experiences significant access problems. More Georgians live in rural areas than residents of other states in the region, and there is a greater presence of family and group child care homes in our state as compared to child care centers. Georgia is last in the Southeastern region for number of licensed child care centers per thousand children under age five. Licensure is an important indicator of high quality care and Georgia's poor performance on this measure raises serious concern about the quality of care Georgia children currently receive.

More than 25% of Georgia children live in poverty. The cost of high quality care would be prohibitive for poor families even if it were widely available, and even care of average quality costs more than poor families can easily pay. Family child care is also more expensive in Georgia than in most of the other states in this study. The average cost of child care in Georgia is more than double public college tuition costs. The state does provide assistance to some low-income families, primarily those leaving welfare, but

those subsidies only serve 8% of low income children deemed eligible for assistance by the federal government. Georgia has also established a higher maximum co-payment requirement than most other states in the region. Furthermore, while the federal government recommends that no more than 10% of a family's income be allotted to child care costs, a typical low income family in Georgia is more likely to have to spend 40% of their income in order to afford care.

Georgia also performs poorly on measures of child care quality. Child to staff ratios are a commonly used indicator of quality in child care facilities and homes. Georgia exceeds the maximum value for children ages zero through three years, meaning it allows a considerably larger number of children to be cared for by one teacher and/or in one classroom than many other states. Wages for child care workers are low in the comparison group and nationally, but Georgia performs relatively well on this measure, ranking 5th in the comparison group. This is still below the national median wage of $6.91 per hour for child care workers.

Another relative bright spot for Georgia is its second place rank, at 20%, in turnover rates among child care workers. More Georgia child care workers are staying in their jobs each year than in other states in our region. However, the workers that stay are less well-trained. Training requirements for child care center teachers and directors are relatively low, with Georgia requiring only ten hours per year in ongoing training for both teachers and directors. Overall, the interaction of poorly-trained teachers, high student to teacher ratios, lack of oversight and a growing population indicates that Georgians should be deeply concerned about the quality and availability of child care in their state.

Child care has a particularly strong impact on children at risk. Poor quality child care can actually impede a child's development, while high quality care has measurable benefits for disadvantaged children. In several long term studies of early childhood educational programs, the participation of low income children in these programs is associated with reduced grade retentions, remedial education and juvenile arrests, and is also associated with an increase in high school graduation rates. Businesses benefit from high quality child care when it reduces employee absenteeism, allows employees to work needed shifts, and builds the foundation for a more highly skilled workforce in the future. While the benefits are clear, child care remains an often overlooked public policy issue in Georgia. Much work remains to be done by government, providers, advocates and families to secure a stable, high quality child care system that will ensure child well-being and support working families over the long term.

INTRODUCTION

As child care becomes an increasingly important public policy issue on the national level, there is emerging concern about Georgia's readiness to meet the needs of its children in care. In an age of welfare reform, national statistics reveal that working families experience great difficulty obtaining the child care they need when they return to work, both because of child care's high cost and lack of availability. Anecdotal evidence from low income working mothers in Georgia indicates that they are worried about the quality of their present arrangements and that in many cases they cannot work or attend school because they cannot afford child care. The following report is an attempt to quantify the performance of Georgia's child care system as a whole and to shed some light on how Georgia compares to its neighbors. Is Georgia, a Southeastern leader in economic growth and development, also a leader in supporting its vulnerable children and families with high quality child care?

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The method employed by this study for describing the state of child care in Georgia is strictly descriptive. The data show how Georgia differs from other states, national averages, and national standards. It is not possible to draw conclusions about why there are differences, nor can the impact of those differences be assessed.

1. Comparison States

A group of twelve comparison states were selected to measure the status of child care in Georgia. The criteria used to select these states included geographic proximity, similar population size, previous application in national child care studies and databases, as well as economic characteristics. Where possible, a national average was provided for comparison. The group of states included:

Alabama
Arkansas
Florida
Kentucky
Louisiana
Massachusetts
Mississippi
North Carolina
South Carolina
Tennessee
Virginia
Washington

2. Data Sources and Limitations

A statewide level of analysis was employed where possible throughout this study. Several national government databases maintained by agencies such as the U.S. Census Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, Child Care Bureau, National Child Care Information Center and the Department of Labor were accessed. Individual state divisions which are responsible for monitoring child care issues were also contacted. In addition, private sources such as the Children's Defense Fund, the Urban Institute and the Anne E. Casey Foundation were examined.

There are several important characteristics and limitations of these data:

- Many of these data represent state characteristics at a particular point in time, and do not describe a trend, if one exists.

- These data are descriptive, not inferential in their application.

- Efforts were made to use the most recently collected data for the year 2000 for all criteria. However, some sources do not update their databases annually and in such cases, the most recent data were collected. In addition, when multiple data sets reflecting different time intervals were available, the most recent data were used for comparison.

- In a few instances, information from multiple, but comparable data sources, was compiled and basic computations were performed to obtain appropriate comparisons.

- While most data represented statistically robust statewide values, in a small number of cases, values reported may result from a more modest sampling procedure.

- Rarely, some states could not provide data necessary for complete comparisons or were not included in certain studies, and in those cases, the state was eliminated from that particular criterion and is so noted.

FINDINGS

Graphical representations were developed to facilitate comparisons across states. Thirty figures with bar graphs are presented and divided into five sections; State Demographic Information, Condition of State Child Care Systems, State Spending on Child Care, Cost of Child Care and Measures of Child Care Quality. Along with each of these bar graphs a brief interpretation is included, as well as the relative ranking of Georgia based on the characteristics of the comparison states in each case. At the beginning of each section a summary is provided. In addition, in Appendix A, a summary of these rankings with the national and state values are offered.

The Growing Need for Child Care

- Median Annual Income of Families with Small Children
- Change in Population 1990-2000
- Projected Change in Population 2000-2010
- Metropolitan Area Population
- Women in Labor Force with Children Under Six
- Population Under Five
- Poverty Rate of Children Under Five

Condition of State Child Care Systems

- Licensed Child Care Centers Per One Thousand Children
- Licensed Family Care Providers Per One Thousand Children
- Licensed Child Care Facilities Per One Thousand Children
- Accredited Child Care Centers
- Average Annual Costs of Child Care and Public College Tuition
- Difference Between Costs of Child Care and Public College Tuition

State Spending on Child Care

- Federal and State Annual Eligibility Income Levels
- Federal Annual Income Eligibility Levels Relative to State Levels
- Low Income Children Served through Subsidized Child Care
- Maximum Co-Payment as a Percent of Income

Cost of Child Care

- Average Annual Tuition for Child Care Centers
- Average Annual Tuition for Family Child Care Providers
- Child Care Cost as a Percent of Income

Measures of Child Care Quality

- Child: Staff Ratio for Nine-Month-Olds
- Child: Staff Ratio for Twenty-seven-Month-Olds
- Child: Staff Ratio for Four-Year-Olds
- Median Hourly Wage for Child Care Workers
- Mean Annual Salary for Teacher Assistants
- Median Hourly Wage for Preschool Teachers
- Caseloads of Child Care Inspectors
- Ongoing Training Hours for Child Care Center Teachers
- Ongoing Training Hours for Child Care Center Directors
- Turnover Rates for Child Care Staff

The Growing Need for Child Care

Georgia has experienced a tremendous growth in population. This growth is evidenced both in overall population but especially in the large number of children under the age of five. The state population trend is projected to continue into the future. A considerable proportion of Georgia's population resides in largely metropolitan areas. A very large percent of women with children under the age of six are active in Georgia's labor force. The annual median income for families with small children in Georgia remains in the average range and the poverty rate for children under the age of five is also at an undesirable level.

Figure 1 shows data on the median annual income of families with small children under six years of age. The national median is $36,910. Georgia ranks sixth in median annual income among its comparison states.

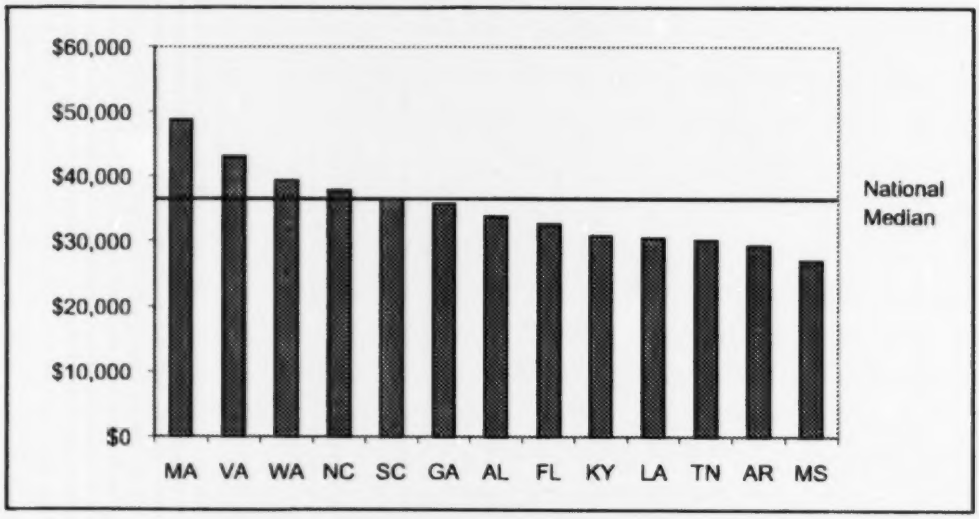

Figure 1. Median Annual Income of Families with Small Children
Source: National Center for Children in Poverty [1]

Figure 2 depicts the growth rates of Georgia and its comparison states. The national percent of population change from 1990 to 2000 was 13.2%. Although all of these states increased in population during the period 1990 to 2000, the population of Georgia increased at the greatest rate.

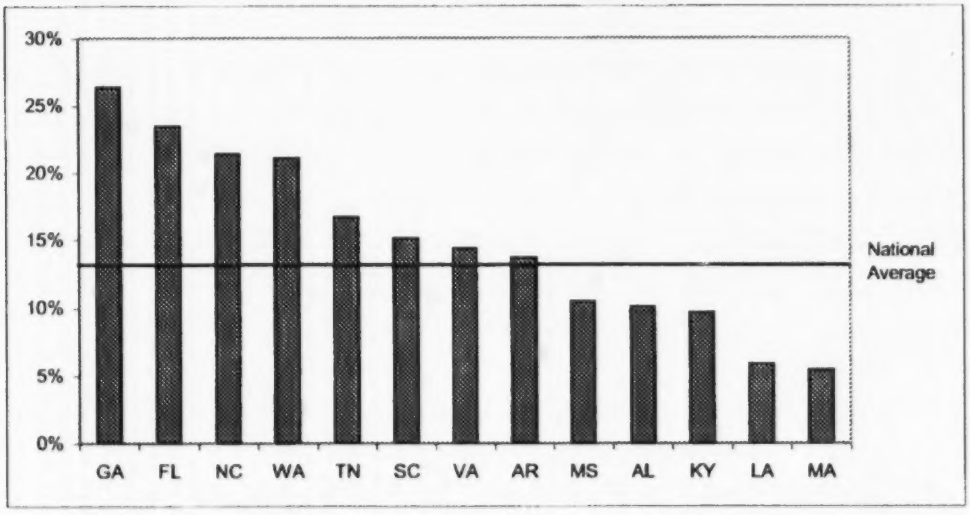

Figure 2. Change in Population 1990–2000
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000) [2]

Figure 3 displays the projected percent of population change for the period 2000 to 2010. These data show that all the comparator states are projected to experience growth during this period, although generally, the rate of growth will slow compared to the past decade. The national rate of change in the population for this period is estimated at 7.8%. Georgia ranks fifth in the projected percent of population growth through 2010.

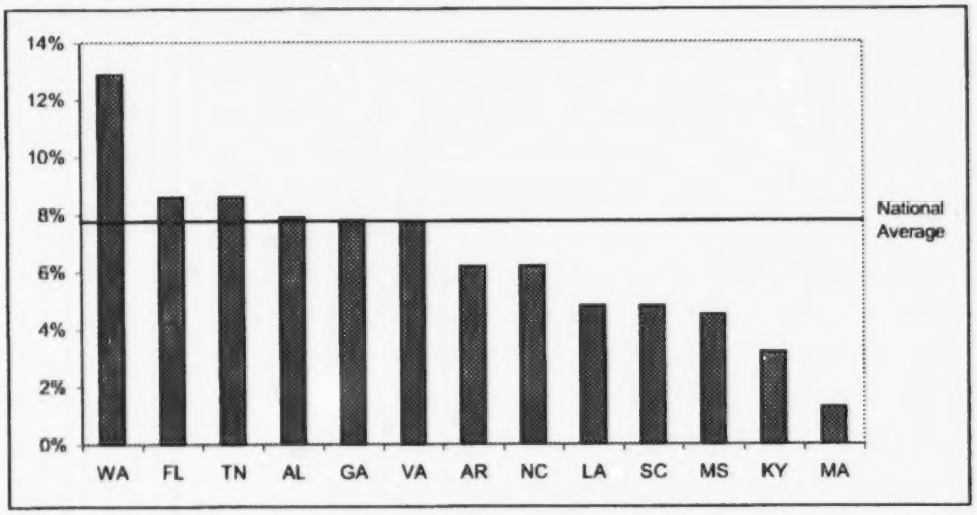

Figure 3. Projected Change in Population 2000–2010
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000) [3]

Figure 4 shows the percent of the population that resides in metropolitan areas in each state. Nationally, 80.1% of the population lives in metropolitan areas. Georgia has a greater proportion of rural residents, ranking ninth within the comparator group for the percent of metropolitan population.

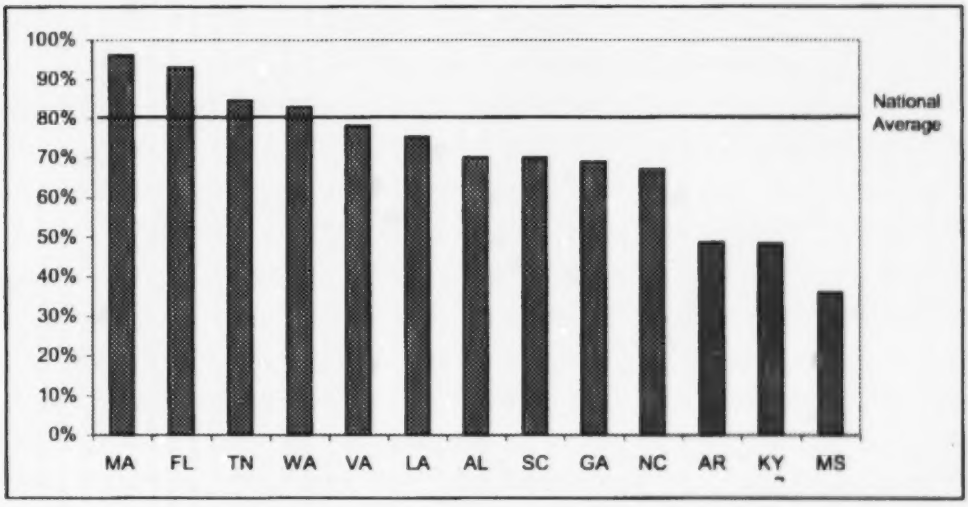

Figure 4. Metropolitan Area Population
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1990) [4]

Figure 5 demonstrates the percent of women in the labor force with children under the age of six. The national value is 59.7%. Georgia ranks third in this characteristic among the comparison states, with more working women with young children than many other southeastern states.

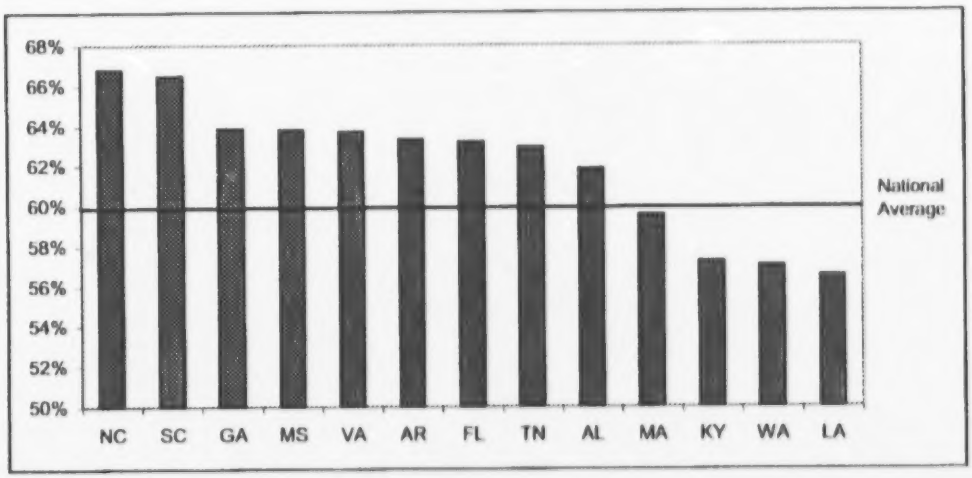

Figure 5. Women in the Labor Force with Children Under Six
Source: Children's Defense Fund (1990) [5]

Figure 6 depicts the population of children under five years of age. The national average is 6.9%. Georgia ranks first in the panel.

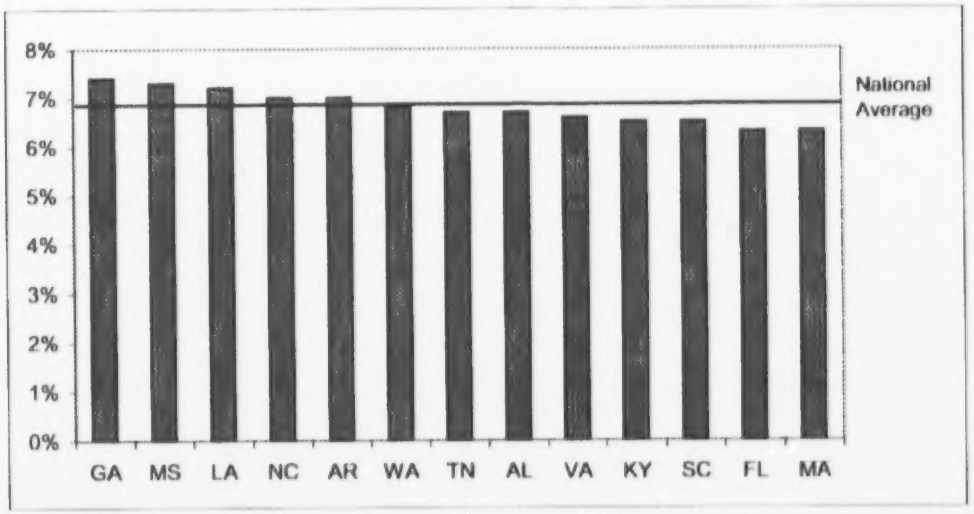

Figure 6. Population Under Five
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1999) [6]

Figure 7 portrays the poverty rates among children under the age of five. No national values are available. Georgia ranks seventh in the percentage of children under the age of five who live below the poverty line.

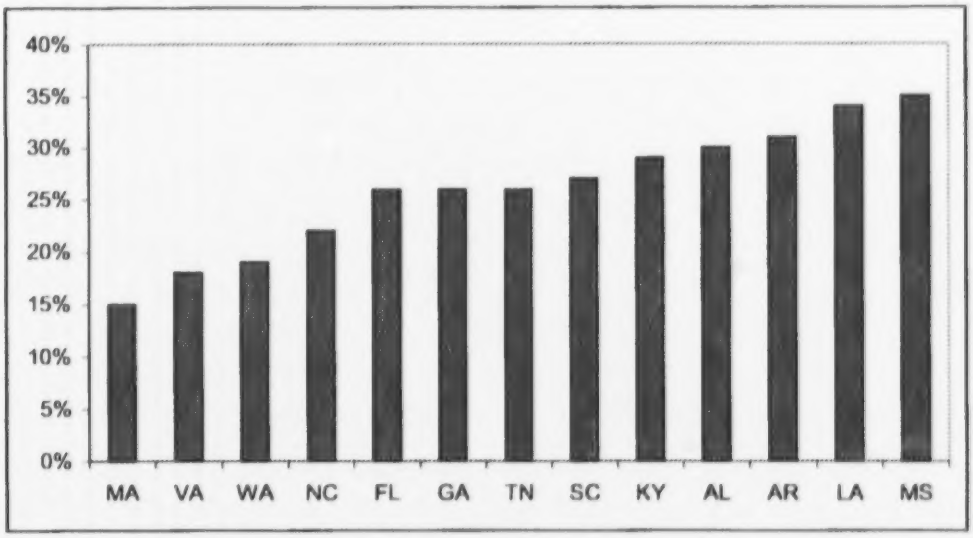

Figure 7. Poverty Rate of Children Under Five
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1996) [7]

Condition of State Child Care Systems

Georgia has an extremely small number of licensed child care facilities available to its children for child care, particularly child care centers. Like most states, the proportion of nationally accredited child care centers is dreadfully low. The discrepancy between the costs of annual tuition for child care and that of public college tuition is very large for the state of Georgia, and second highest in the comparison group.

Figure 8 shows the number of licensed child care centers for every one thousand children under the age of five. Nationally, this value is 5.4 centers. Georgia ranks thirteenth with respect to this comparison group.

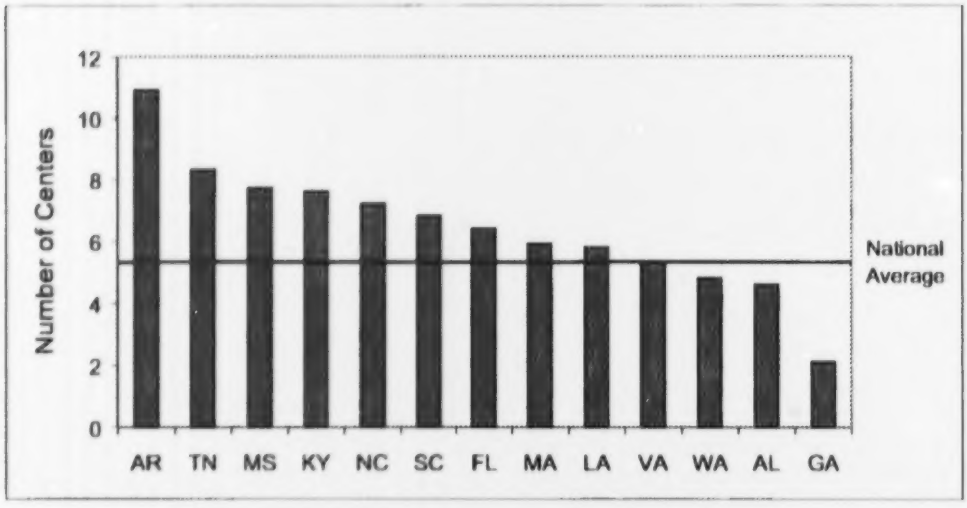

Figure 8. Licensed Child Care Centers Per One Thousand Children
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1999) [8]

Figure 9 describes the number of licensed family care providers per one thousand children under five years of age. The national value is 15.3 providers for every one thousand children. Georgia ranks fifth in the number of licensed family care providers available to children under five.

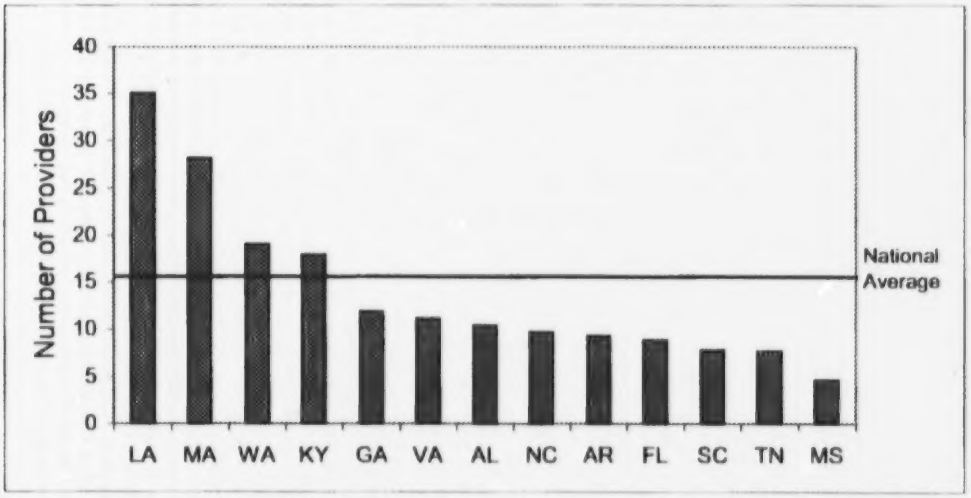

Figure 9. Licensed Family Care Providers Per One Thousand Children
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1999) [8]

Figure 10 portrays the total number of licensed child care facilities per one thousand children under the age of five. These licensed child care facilities include both child care centers and family care providers, and the figure represents Figures 8 and 9 combined. Nationally, 20.7 facilities are available for every one thousand children. Georgia is twelfth with respect to the number of licensed facilities available for child care.

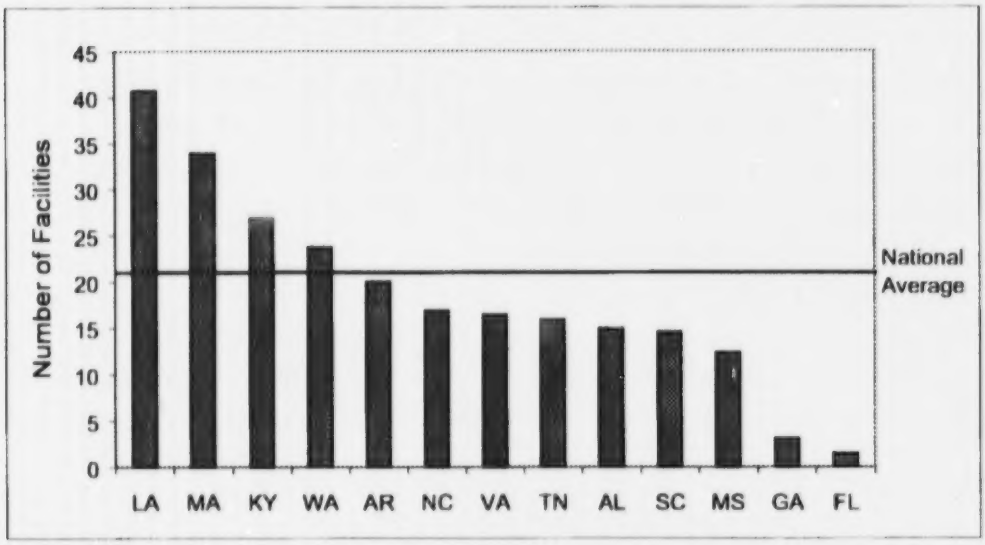

Figure 10. Licensed Child Care Facilities Per One Thousand Children
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1999) [8]

Figure 11 demonstrates the percent of child care centers nationally accredited by one of the recognized accreditation organizations, including the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA), and the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC). There is no national comparison value available. In the majority of the states, less than 10% of the child care centers are accredited. Georgia ranks third among these states in terms of percent of accredited child care centers.

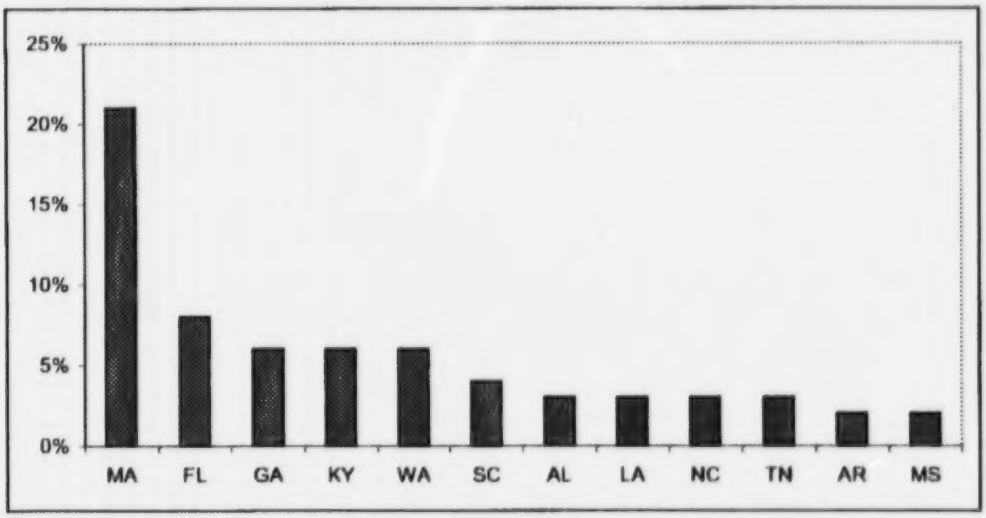

Figure 11. Accredited Child Care Centers
Source: Children's Defense Fund (1997) [9]

Figure 12 illustrates the average annual cost of child care as compared to the average annual cost of tuition for a four-year state public college. In all cases, child care center costs exceed those of public college tuition. There is no national value available. Georgia ranks second in the relative amount in which the annual cost of child care exceeds that of annual college tuition costs.

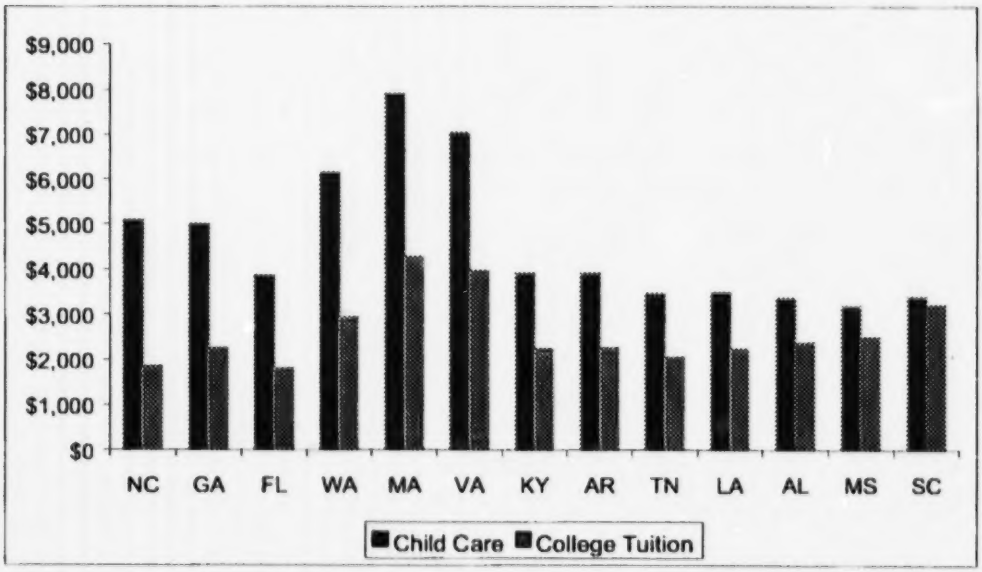

Figure 12. Average Annual Costs of Child Care and Public College Tuition
Source: Children's Defense Fund (1997) [10]

Figure 13 demonstrates the percent difference between the average annual costs of child care as compared to public college tuition. Child care is often compared with public college tuition because of its similar high expense, state support, and importance for a child's future productivity. Georgia ranks second from last in all states studied for the extent to which the annual cost of child care outpaces the cost of public college tuition. No national values are available.

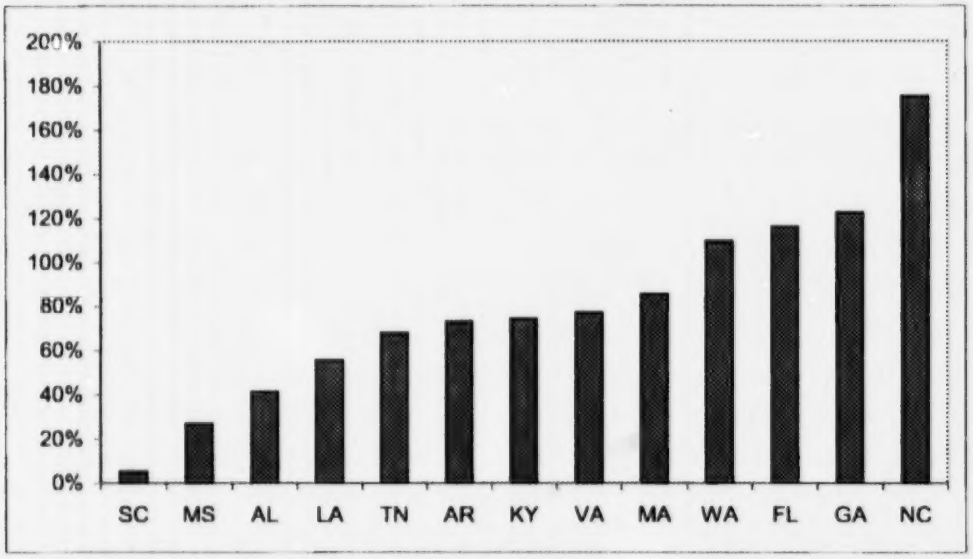

Figure 13. Difference Between Costs of Child Care and Public College Tuition
Source: Children's Defense Fund (1997) [10]

State Spending on Child Care

The gap between the level of annual income suggested by federal authorities for a family to be eligible for child care subsidy and that required by the state of Georgia is large. As a result of this gap, a very small percent of the large number of low income children in Georgia who are considered eligible by the federal guidelines do not receive child care subsidies. For those children who are eligible for subsidized care, the maximum co-payment their parents are required to make by Georgia represents a considerable proportion of their income.

Figure 14 displays the recommended federal annual income levels required for a family of three to qualify for eligibility for subsidized child care as well as the corresponding annual income levels required by individual states. In every case, the comparison shows the state levels are lower than those required by the federal government, resulting in fewer children receiving subsidized child care than the federal government guidelines would allow. There is no national value, but only a few states set their state level as high as the federal government. Georgia ranks seventh in the relative magnitude of difference between the annual income required for eligibility by federal authorities and that required by state.

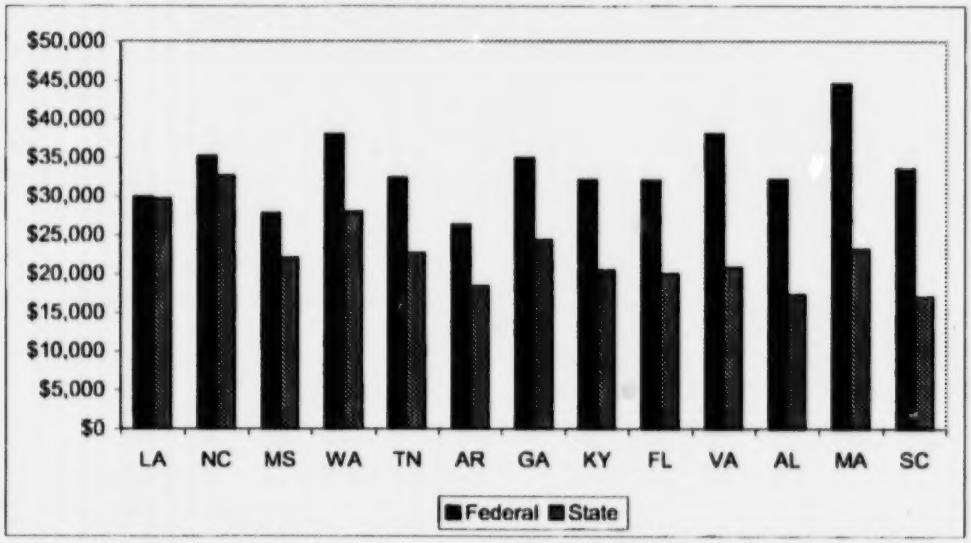

Figure 14. Federal and State Annual Income Eligibility Levels
Source: Children's Defense Fund (1999) [11]

Figure 15 displays the percent difference between the federal and state annual income levels required for families to be eligible for subsidized child care. There are no national values with which to compare. Georgia ranks seventh compared to this panel of states with respect to this criterion.

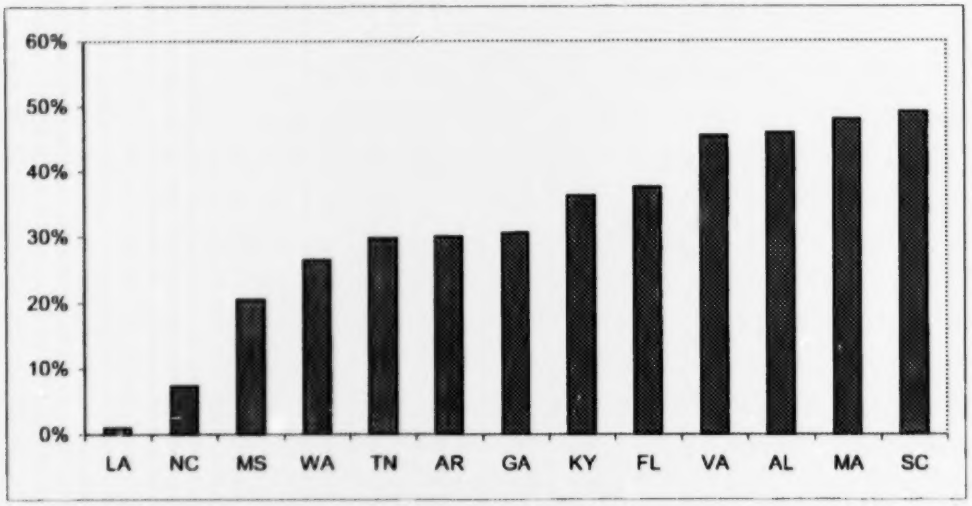

Figure 15. Federal Annual Eligibility Levels Relative to State Levels
Source: Children's Defense Fund (1999) [11]

Figure 16 shows the percent of low income children who are served through subsidized child care in each of these states. Low income in this case is defined as 85% of the state median income (SMI). In every case, the percentage of children who receive subsidies is low, less than 20% for these states, and 12% for states nationwide. Georgia ranks seventh in comparison to these states.

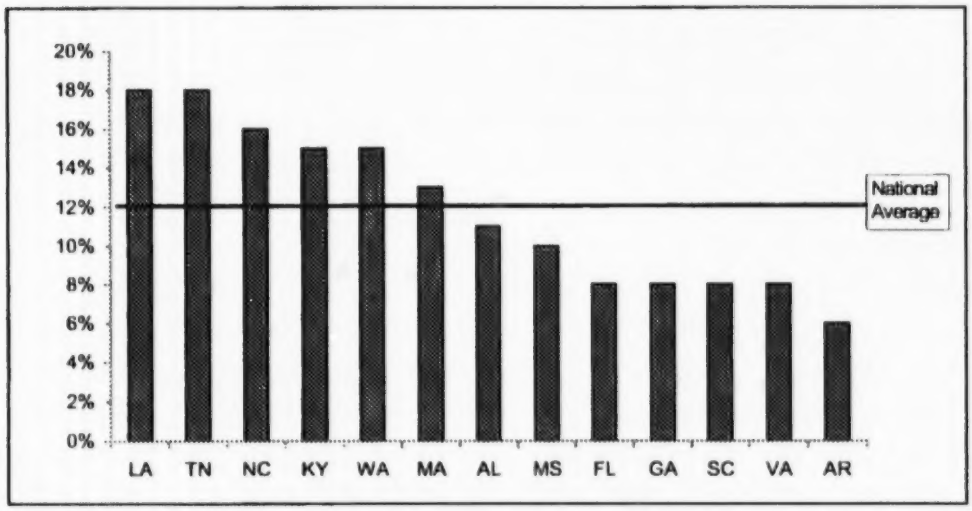

Figure 16. Low Income Children Served through Subsidized Child Care
Source: Administration for Children and Families (1999) [12]

Figure 17 describes the maximum co-payment for which a family of three with an infant and a 4-year-old in full time center-based care would be responsible as a percent of their income. No national values are available. Georgia ranks third in the percent of their income a family's maximum co-payment would represent. Note: these data were collected prior to implementation of the Georgia Pre-K program, and under current conditions the 4-year-old would only incur a copayment for after school care, which would improve Georgia's rank on this measure.

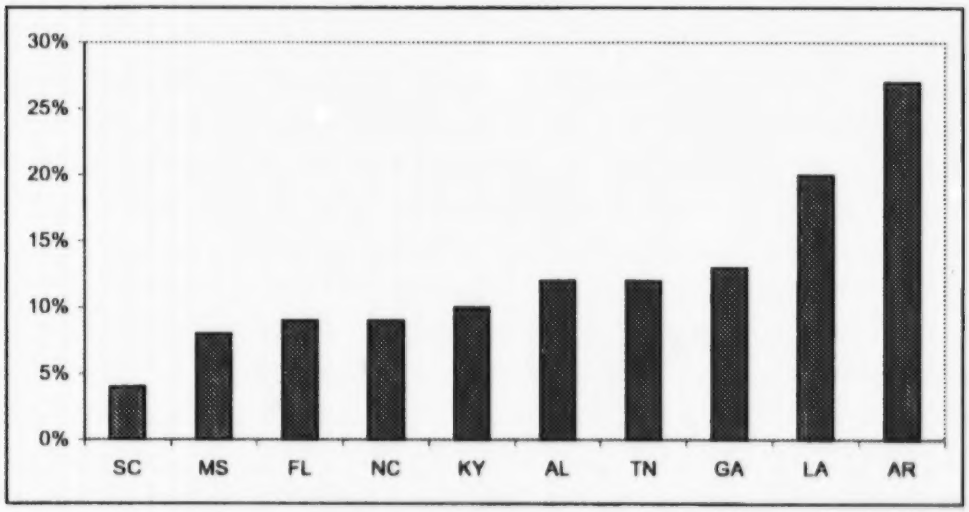

Figure 17. Maximum Co-Payment as a Percent of Income
Source: The Southern Institute on Children and Families (2000) [13]

Cost of Child Care

The average annual tuition for care in child care centers as well as family care providers in Georgia is average among those of the comparator states for both twelve-month-olds and four-year olds. The cost of care in these arrangements however, represents an unacceptably large percentage of the income of Georgia's families as compared to comparator states and the federal standard. While the Georgia Pre-K program has eliminated tuition costs for 4-year-olds during school hours since the time that these data were collected, it is reasonable to assume that the cost of after-school care for 4-year-olds is similar to the values reflected in Figures 18-20.

Figure 18 displays the average annual tuition for child care for twelve-month-olds and four-year-olds in child care centers. In general, tuition for the care of four-year-olds is less than that for twelve-month-olds. National comparator values are not available. Georgia ranks eighth in the cost of tuition for this type of child care. Note: these data were collected prior to implementation of the Georgia Pre-K program, and under current conditions 4-year-olds would only incur a copayment for after school care, which would improve Georgia's rank on this measure.

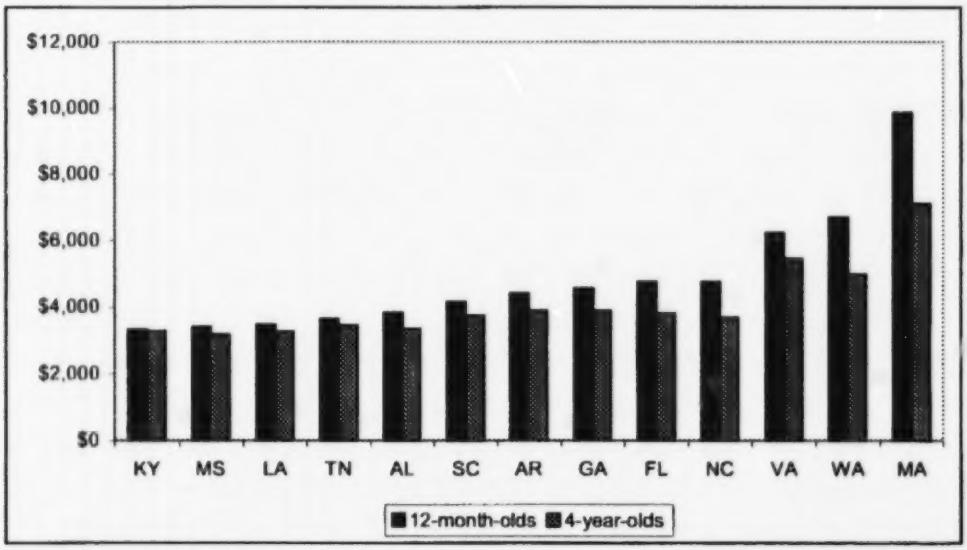

Figure 18. Average Annual Tuition for Child Care Centers
Source: Children's Defense Fund (1997) [14]

Figure 19 shows the average annual tuition for child care for twelve-month-olds and four-year-olds by family care providers. In general, tuition for the care of four-year-olds is less than that for twelve-month-olds. National Comparator values are not available. Georgia ranks seventh in the cost of tuition for child care by family care providers. Note: these data were collected prior to implementation of the Georgia Pre-K program, and under current conditions the 4-year-old would only incur a copayment for after school care, which would improve Georgia's rank on this measure.

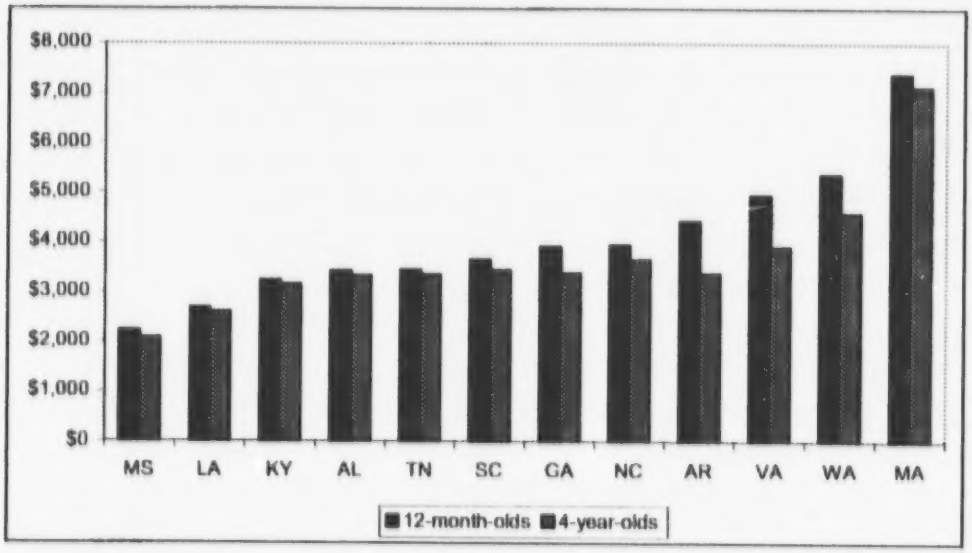

Figure19. Average Annual Tuition for Family Care Providers
Source: Children's Defense Fund (1997) [15]

Figure 20 displays the average annual cost of high quality child care as a percent of the average annual income for families with both an infant and a four-year-old cared for in a child care center. Federal authorities recommend no more than 10% of family income be allocated to child care costs. Georgia ranks fourth relative to this characteristic. Note: these data were collected prior to implementation of the Georgia Pre-K program, and under current conditions the 4-year-old would only incur a co-payment for after school care, which would improve Georgia's rank on this measure.

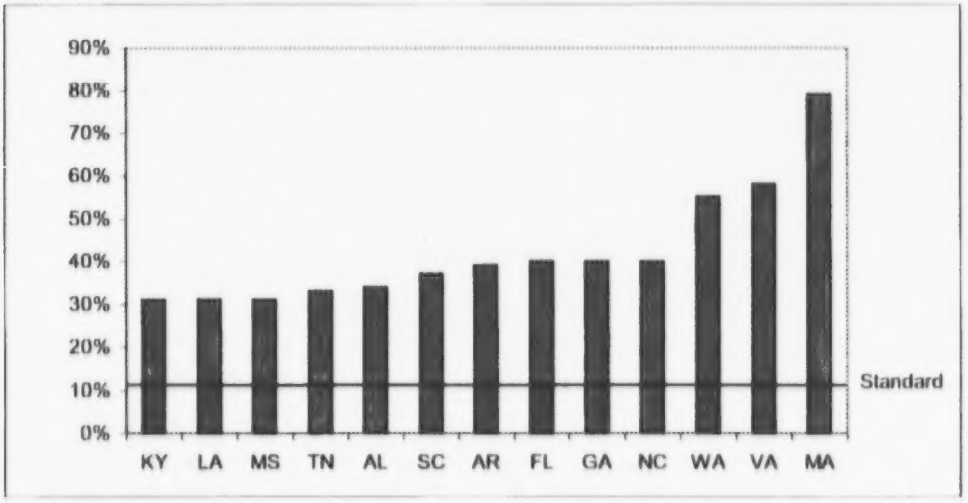

Figure 20. Child Care Cost as Percent of Income
Source: Children's Defense Fund (1997) [16]

Measures of Child Care Quality

The state of Georgia allows each type of child care facility to exceed the maximum recommended child to staff ratio in all settings and for all age groups. The wages of child care workers and preschool teachers in these arrangements in Georgia are relatively comparable to those of the other states in this study. Georgia teacher assistants however, receive a lower relative wage than many of their counterparts in other states. Caseloads of child care inspectors in Georgia are large with comparison to those in other states. Georgia does not require as much ongoing training for both child care center teachers and directors as do other states. Turnover rates for child care staff members in Georgia are relatively low.

Figure 21 shows the average ratio of the number of nine-month-old children as compared to child care staff in child care centers for each state. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends that maximum ratios for this age group to be four to one. No national average is available. Georgia exceeds the maximum value for this age group.

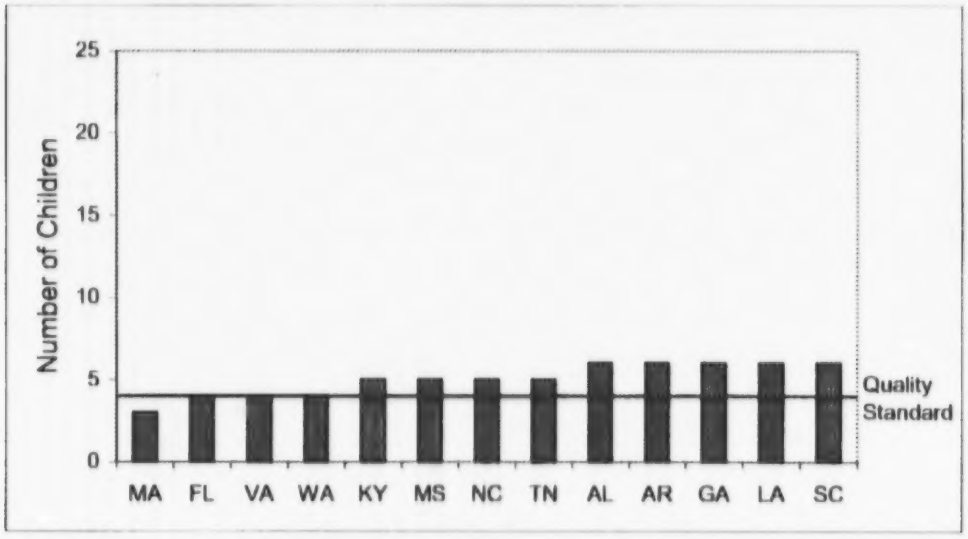

Figure 21. Child: Staff Ratio for 9-Month-Olds
Source: Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education (2000) [17]

Figure 22 shows the average ratio of the number of twenty-seven-month-old children as compared to child care staff in child care centers for each state. No national comparison data are available. The NAEYC recommends that the maximum ratio for this age group to be seven to one. Georgia exceeds this maximum value for this age group.

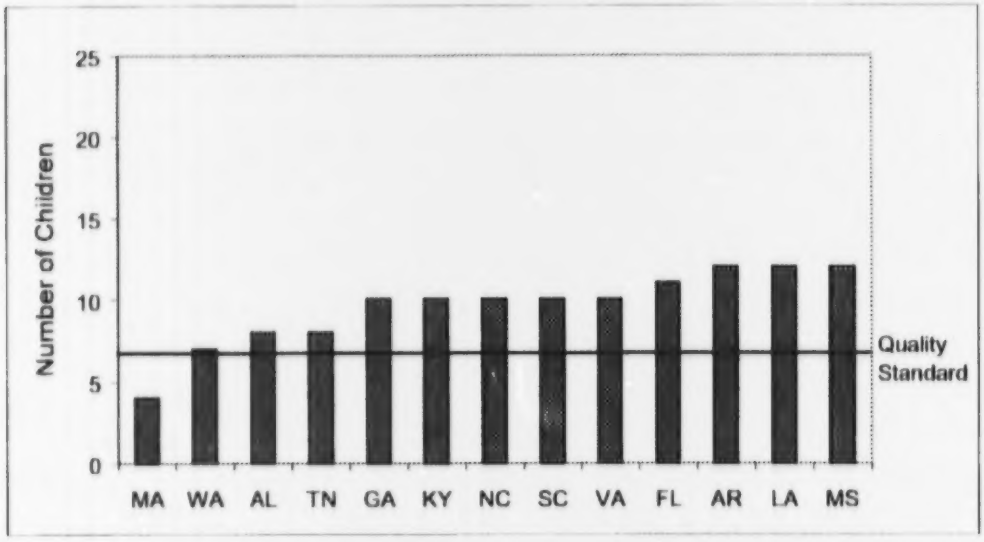

Figure 22. Child: Staff Ratio for 27-Month-Olds
Source: Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education (2000) [17]

Figure 23 shows the average ratio of the number of four-year-old children as compared to child care staff in child care centers for each state. No national data are available. The NAEYC recommends that the maximum ratio for this age group be ten to one. The Georgia Pre-K program meets NAEYC standards and ranks first in this age group. It is important to note that for 4-year-old children not enrolled in Pre-K, Georgia's standard is 18 to one, well above the NAEYC and Pre-K level.

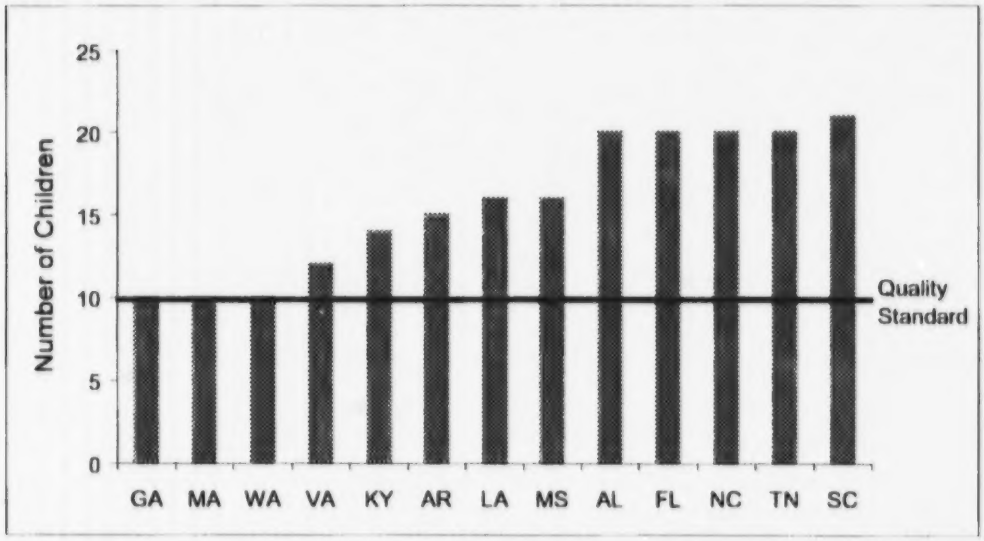

Figure 23. Child: Staff Ratio for 4-Year-Olds
Source: Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education (2000) [17]

Figure 24 depicts the median hourly wage for child care workers. Child care workers attend to children at schools, businesses, private households, and child care institutions. They perform a variety of tasks such as dressing, feeding, bathing, and overseeing play. For all comparison states, the figures are above the federal minimum wage level of $5.15. The national median hourly wage for child care workers is $6.91. Georgia ranks fifth in average wages for child care workers.

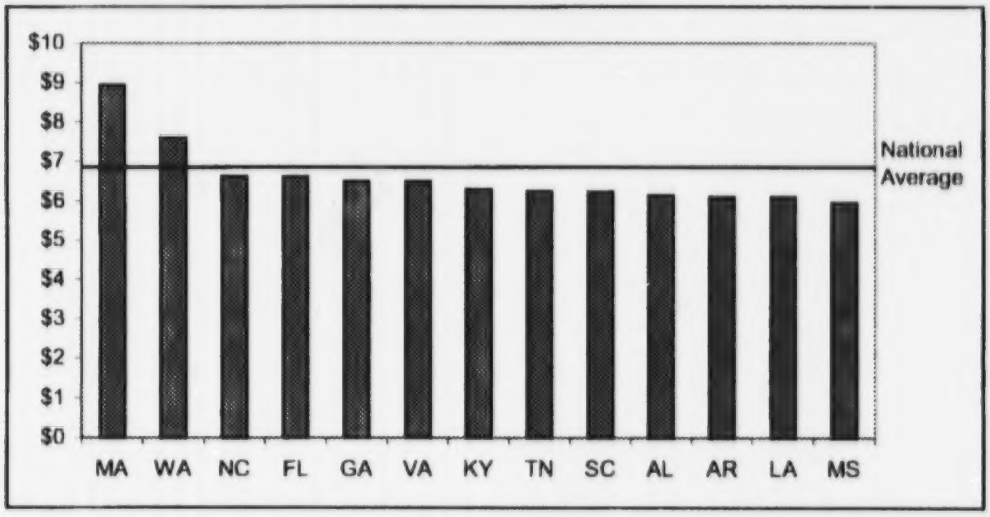

Figure 24. Median Hourly Wage for Child Care Workers
Source: Occupational Employment Statistics (1999) [18]

Figure 25 displays the median hourly wage for preschool teachers. Preschool teachers instruct children (normally up to five years of age) in activities designed to promote social, physical, and intellectual growth needed for primary school in preschools, day care centers, or other child development facilities. For all comparator states, the figures are above the federal minimum wage level of $5.15. The national median hourly wage is $8.41. Georgia ranks third with respect to the median hourly wage for preschool teachers.

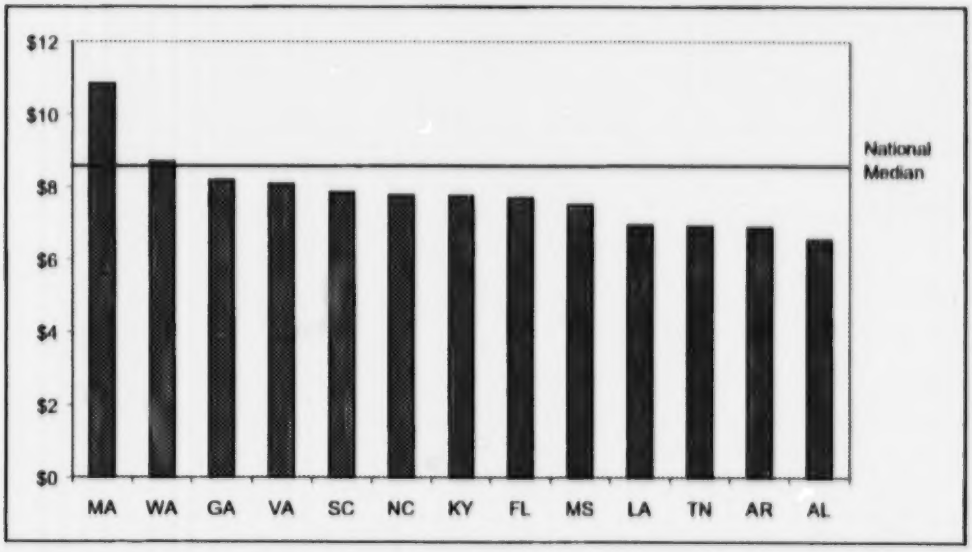

Figure 25. Median Hourly Wage of Preschool Teachers
Source: Occupational Employment Statistics (1999) [18]

Figure 26 illustrates the relative caseloads of child care for each full time member of the licensing inspection staff in the comparison states. No national data are available. Georgia ranks third in the number of licensed child care centers per inspector.

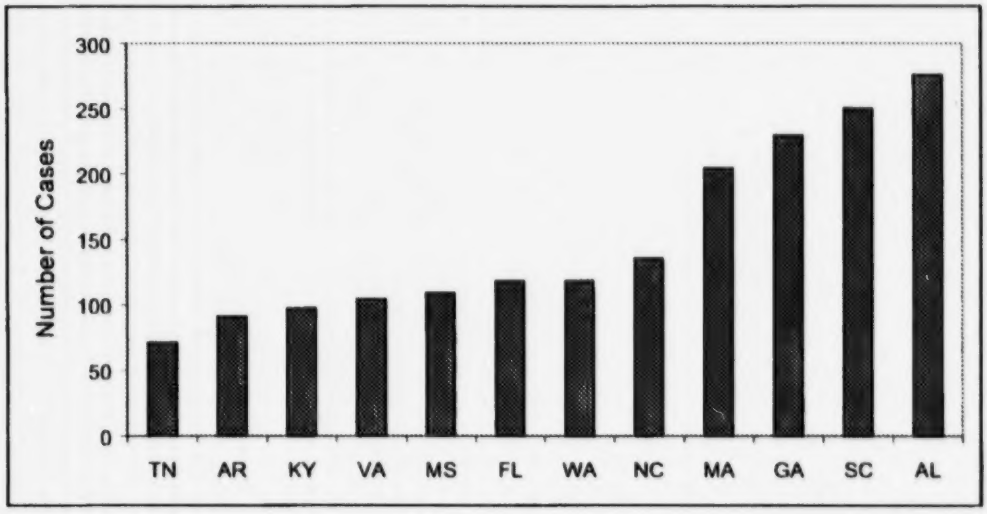

Figure 26. Caseloads of Child Care Inspectors
Source: National Child Care Information Center (2000) [19]

Figure 27 describes the required ongoing training hours for child care center teachers. National comparison values are not available. Georgia ranks fifth in the number of hours required for the ongoing training of child care center teachers.

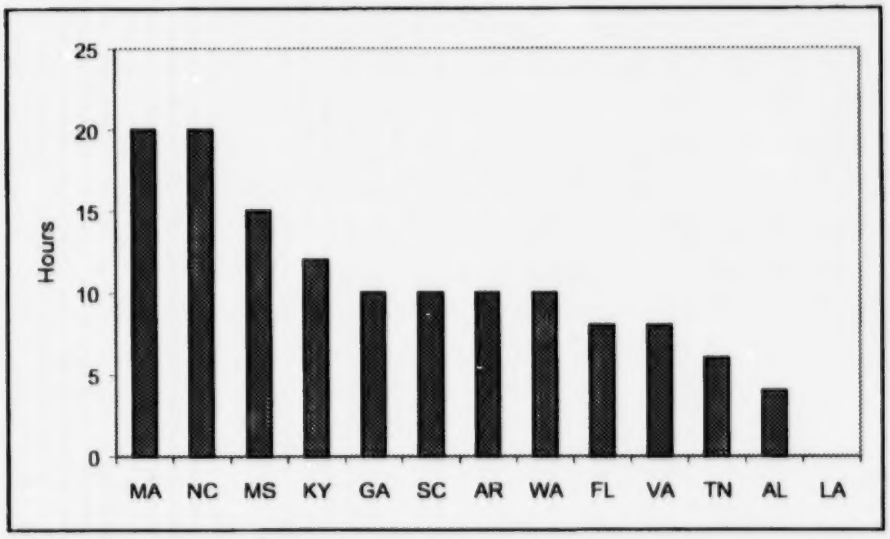

Figure 27. Required Ongoing Hours Training Hours for Child Care Center Teachers
Source: Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education (2000) [20]

Figure 28 shows the number of ongoing training hours required of child care center directors. National values are not available. Georgia ranks seventh in the number of hours required for ongoing training for these administrators.

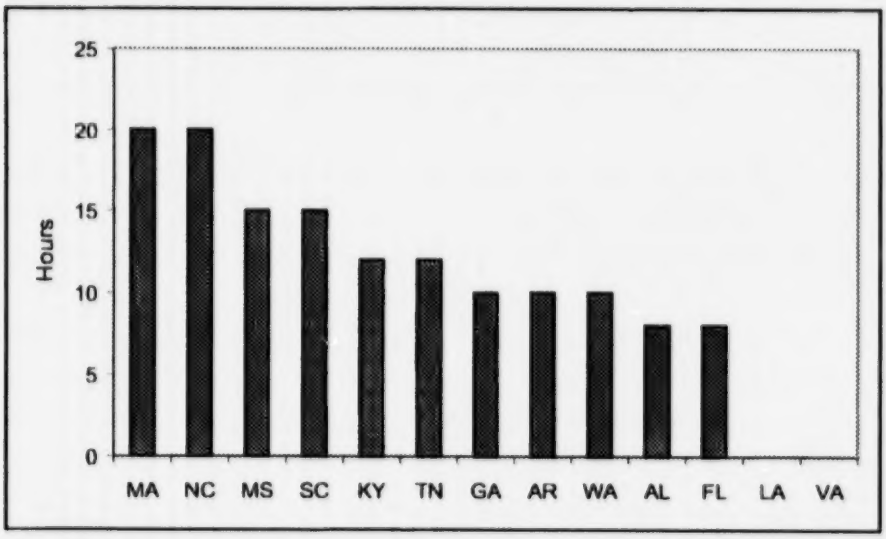

Figure 28. Required Ongoing Training Hours for Child Care Center Directors
Sources: Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education (2000) [21]

Figure 29 demonstrates the turnover rates among child care staff members. National values are not available. Georgia ranks ninth in the rate of turnover for these staff members.

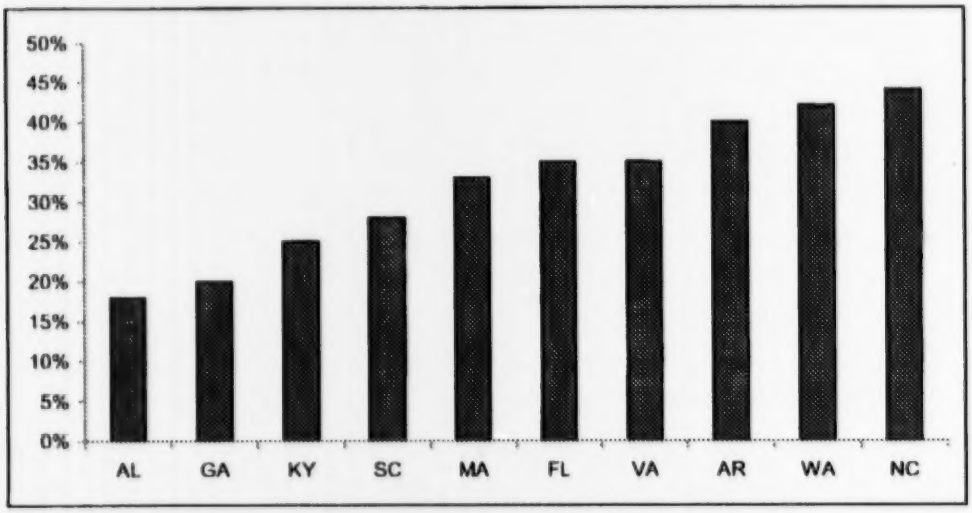

Figure 29. Turnover Rates for Child Care Staff
Source: Children's Defense Fund (1998) [21]

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

No single measure can represent the complicated array of factors that influence child care programs across the state of Georgia. The charts in this report, while stemming from diverse sources and attempting to document as many aspects of state child care systems as possible, still serve only as estimates for the impact of everyday activities and events that children in care experience.

A careful comparison of Georgia to its regional neighbors and geographic equivalents reveals a rapidly growing state with a somewhat larger population of young children and working mothers, and more rural residents. Median income and child poverty rates place Georgia roughly in the middle of the comparison group. A child care system in Georgia, then, should be expected to serve higher numbers of children across the state, and notably in more rural areas, while the families paying for care cannot be expected to have greater resources than their peers elsewhere.

What is the condition of the child care system that currently exists in Georgia? The state performs as well as other states on one indicator of quality, percent of child care centers with national accreditation. However, the number of licensed child care centers per thousand children ranks Georgia second lowest in the comparison group, meaning that what accredited care exists is limited to an extremely small proportion of the population. Georgians appear to rely disproportionately heavily on family child care, perhaps a result of greater numbers of rural residents. This has implications for regulators, who require more resources to reach a higher number of child care locations.

The cost of child care is often compared with public college tuition to provide an indication of relative state support for different forms of education. Families generally must pay for child care earlier in their careers, during a period of their lives when their income is more likely to be low, and yet there are few public supports to assist them. Meanwhile college students, whose parents have already had an opportunity to save and increase their incomes through an established work history, find state-supported universities and publicly-funded loans and scholarships. For every state in the study, child care center costs are greater than that state's average annual cost of public college tuition. Georgia, however, still exceeds all the comparison states but one in the disparity between public college tuition and the cost of child care. Although Georgia has recently made significant strides with its statewide Pre-K program and K-12 education reform, it still has not prioritized support for education of its most vulnerable child population, those younger than four years old.

The state's degree of support for child care can also be measured by the annual income levels it sets for families to be eligible for child care subsidies. Georgia, like the majority of states, sets its annual income eligibility standard considerably lower than the amount of income allowed by federal authorities. It ranks in the middle of the comparison group for this measure, and in the second-lowest group for the percent of children served through subsidized child care in each state. In other words, Georgia has average performance for the region in the number of low income families that it makes eligible

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for child care subsidies, but poorer than average performance on actually providing subsidy assistance. Georgia also ranks poorly on a third measure of state support for child care, having a higher maximum co-payment that a family must pay as a percent of income. From a policy perspective, it is clear that Georgia has established program standards that limit its ability to assist low income families, and Georgia has also missed opportunities to help the families it declared eligible for assistance.

Does Georgia set stricter eligibility standards for subsidies because the cost of child care is more affordable here? Research shows that this cannot be the explanation. For both center- and family-based providers, the average annual cost of child care in Georgia ranks it in the upper half of the comparison group. Despite Georgia's more rural population, which might result in more lower-priced options, Georgia's average child care costs rank it in the upper third of the comparison group. When the cost of high quality child care is considered, Georgia ranks behind only four other states; Massachusetts, Virginia, Washington and North Carolina; for the percent of family income required to pay for this care. It is fair to state that child care is more expensive in Georgia than most other states in the region.

There are strong indications that the quality of child care in Georgia does not compare favorably to its neighbors, either. One of the most common, and important, predictors of high quality child care is a low child to staff ratio in centers and homes. The state's child care licensing standards allow many more children per staff member than NAEYC recommends for both 9 month-olds and 27 month-olds. While the Georgia Pre-K program has adopted NAEYC standards (10 four year-olds per teacher), the state has not mandated that ratio for the care of 4 year-olds in non-Pre-K programs. Median hourly wages for child care workers and preschool teachers rank Georgia 5th and 3rd, respectively, in the comparison group, but still below the national median. Wages are an indicator of quality child care because higher wages tend to retain more experienced and highly trained staff.

The degree of oversight plays a role in whether child care providers uphold the state quality standards that exist. Georgia's extremely high caseloads for licensing inspection staff are exceeded only by South Carolina and Alabama. At 229 cases per inspector, Georgia is requiring its inspectors to visit 65% more child care locations than the average for this group. Also, the amount of training required of child care teachers and center directors gives some idea about how well-trained a state's child care work force may be. At 10 hours of ongoing training required for teachers and directors per year, Georgia ranks in the middle of the comparison group, with Massachusetts and North Carolina requiring double the number of hours that Georgia does, but with Louisiana requiring none. A final indicator of quality examined in this research were turnover rates among child care staff members. This is a bright spot for Georgia, with the second lowest-turnover rate in the comparison group. More child care staff are remaining on the job in Georgia than in almost every other state.

CONCLUSION

In almost every area, there is cause for concern about the condition of Georgia's child care system. While Georgia is a Southeastern leader in many fields, its performance is average or worse on most measures of child care. Child care has an important impact on both children, who need high quality child care to thrive and meet their fullest developmental potential, and upon parents, for whom child care allows them to work, maintaining their independence and providing for their families. If Georgia continues to lag behind its neighbors there will undoubtedly be a heavy price to pay.

Clear opportunities for improvement lie in a few key areas. Georgia's child care regulators need to review and update licensing standards to reflect current knowledge about the conditions required to achieve high quality care. Georgia needs to lower its child to staff ratios and raise training levels of child care workers. More licensing inspectors are needed to allow for acceptable workloads and more frequent communication of standards to providers. Detailed research should be carried out to investigate the high presence of family child care in Georgia and to gain a better understanding of whether or not these providers are meeting families' needs.

The relationship between child care and employment may be undervalued in Georgia. Through welfare reforms many states have found that child care is an integral part of promoting sustained independence and work. Georgia currently prioritizes child care for welfare-leavers. Without offering equivalent supports for working poor families Georgia leaves them vulnerable to work disruptions caused by inadequate child care and the cycle of poverty continues. Comparison with other states shows that Georgia could set higher income thresholds, allowing more low income families to qualify for subsidies, and Georgia could minimize or eliminate required co-payments. However, to make a meaningful, measurable impact on a young parent's ability to go to work, Georgia must be willing to pay for a substantial proportion of his or her child care expenses. The most important opportunity to assist working families lies in providing sufficient state funding to fully implement the Child Care and Development Fund programs currently available through the federal government.

End Notes:

1. This value was compiled by the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) in the "Map and Track: State Initiatives for Young Children and Families" 2000 edition "State Profiles" developed for each state. "Small children" are defined as those under the age of six. These data represent averages from *March Current Population Surveys* from the U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics from 1994, 1996, and 1998.

2. U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Brief: "Population Change and Distribution."

3. Calculated from U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2000. Table No. 23, State Population Projections: 2000 to 2025. This percentage was calculated from population projections from the "Series A" projection model.

4. U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2000, Table No. 33. Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Population by State: 1980 to 1998. "Metropolitan" areas refer to 258 metropolitan statistical areas as defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, June 30, 1999.

5. From the Children's Defense Fund publication, "2000 Children in the States" state profiles produced for each individual state.

6. Calculated using two tables: U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, Table No. 24: Resident Population by Age and State: 1999 and Table 20: Resident Population by State: 1980 to 1999.

7. The National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) posted these data from the U.S. Census Bureau Report "State Estimates for People Under Age 5 in Poverty for U.S.: 1996. Poverty level is defined by the federal poverty level for 1996.

8. Calculated from two tables: U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2000, Table No. 634. Licensed Child Care Centers and Family Care Providers by State: 1999 and U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, Table No. 24: Resident Population by Age and State: 1999. "Child Care Centers" are non-family operated businesses. "Family Care Providers" include those child care arrangements operated by families such as family child care homes and group child care homes.

9. From a Children's Defense Fund publication, "1998 Child Care Challenges," produced for each individual state, and authored by Gina Adams and Karen Schulman. Virginia did not report information for this characteristic.

10. From a Children's Defense Fund publication, "1998 Child Care Challenges," produced for each individual state and authored by Gina Adams and Karen Schulman. The Children's Defense Fund uses the average annual cost of child care in a child care center for a four-year-old to develop this criterion.

11. From the Children's Defense Fund publication, "2000 Children in the States" state profiles produced for each individual state.

12. From an Administration for Children and Families, HHS News Release, December 6, 2000: "New Statistics Show Only Small Percentage of Eligible Families Receive Child Care Help."

13. From Table 17 "Eligibility Ceilings and Maximum Co-Payment for Family of Three" from an appendix entitled, "Access to Child Care Assistance A Survey of Sixteen Southern States and the District of Columbia," by Louise Stoney and Jane Daugherty prepared for the Southern Institute on Children and Families for the paper "Sound Investments: Financial Support for Child Care Builds Workforce Capacity and Promotes School Readiness." This paper did not provide information for the following states: Massachusetts, Virginia, and Washington.

14. From a Children's Defense Fund Publication, "1998 Child Care Challenges," produced for each state, and authored by Gina Adams and Karen Schulman. The average costs of child care for twelve-month-olds and four-year-olds in child care centers for each state as reported by the Children's Defense Fund may be based on small sample sizes. The sampling procedures may also not be consistent from state to state.

15. From a Children's Defense Fund Publication, "1998 Child Care Challenges," produced for each state, and authored by Gina Adams and Karen Schulman. The average costs of child care for twelve-month-olds and four-year-olds by family care providers for each state as reported by the Children's Defense Fund may be based on small sample sizes. The sampling procedures may also not be consistent from state to state. Information for this criterion is not available for Florida.

16. From a Children's Defense Fund Publication, "1998 Child Care Challenges," produced for each state, and authored by Gina Adams and Karen Schulman. The authors are describing the income for a family with two children in child care centers; one infant and one four-year-old. The average costs of child care for twelve-month-olds and four-year-olds in child care centers for each state as reported by the Children's Defense Fund may be based on small sample sizes. The sampling procedures may also not be consistent from state to state.

17. As posted on the National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) database, from a Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education (at Wheelock College) publication, " Child Care Centers Child:Staff Ratio and Group Size Requirements." The maximum ratios of children to staff were used as are recommended by the Education and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) on their website.

18. From the Occupational Employment Statistics report, "1999 National, State, Metropolitan and Balance of State Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates," compiled for each individual state.

19. The National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) posted these data from the U.S. General Accounting Office report "Child Care State Efforts to Enforce Safety and Health Requirements." Louisiana did not report this information.

20. The Center for Career Development in Early Child Care and Education compiled these data from two reports: "Child Care Licensing Requirements: Minimum Pre-service Qualifications and Annual Ongoing Training Hours for Teachers and Master Teachers in Child Care Centers" and "Child Care Licensing Requirements: Minimum Pre-service Qualifications and Annual Ongoing, and Administrative Training Hours for Directors in Child Care Centers."

21. From a Children's Defense Fund Publication, "1998 Child Care Challenges," produced for each state, and authored by Gina Adams and Karen Schulman. Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee did not report values. The Children's Defense Fund reports these values in a variety of ways, they may report values for child care workers, or teachers and may describe values for these staff members in wither child care centers or for family care provider settings.

Appendix A: Data Summary

State Demographic Information:

Georgia is sixth in median annual income for families with small children over the average of years 1994, 1996, and 1998 at $35,700; national value is $36,910; range is from $48,800 (Massachusetts) $27,020 (Mississippi)

Georgia is first in the percent change in population from 1990 to 2000 at 26.4%; national value is 13.2%; range is from 26.4% (Georgia) to 5.5% (Massachusetts)

Georgia is fifth in the percent population change projected for 2000 to 2010 at 7.8%; national value is 7.8%; range is from 12.9% (Washington) to 1.3% (Massachusetts)

Georgia is ninth in percent of metropolitan population at 68.9% in 1990; nation value is 80.1%; range is from 96.1% (Massachusetts) to 35.9% (Mississippi)

Georgia is third in the percent of women in the labor force with children under the age of six at 63.9% in 1990; national value is 59.7%; range is from 66.8% (North Carolina) to 56.5% (Louisiana)

Georgia is second in the percent of children under the age of five at 7.4% in 1999; national value is 6.9%; range is from 7.4 (Georgia) to 6.3 (Florida and Massachusetts)

Georgia is seventh in the poverty rate of children under the age of five at 26% in 1996 (with Florida and Tennessee); range is from 35% (Mississippi) to 15% (Massachusetts)

Condition of State Child Care Systems:

Georgia is thirteenth in the number of licensed child care centers per 1000 children under five at 2.1 centers in 1999; national value is 5.4; range is from 10.9 (Arkansas) to 2.1 (Georgia)

Georgia is fifth in the number of licensed family care providers per 1000 childre under five at 11.9 providers in 1999; national value is 15.3; range is from 35 (Louisiana) to 4.7 (Mississippi)

Georgia is twelfth in the number of licensed child care facilities per 1000 children under five at 3.1 facilities in 1999; national value is 20.7; range is from 40.7 (Louisiana) to 1.5 (Florida)

Georgia is third in the percent of nationally accredited child care centers 6% (with Kentucky and Washington) 1997; no national value available; range is from 21% (Massachusetts) to 2% (Arkansas and Mississippi)

Georgia is second in the relative difference between the average annual cost of child care at $4992 compared to that of tuition at a public college at $2244 (or 122.5%) in 1997; no national value available; range is from $5068 and $1841 respectively (or 175.3%) (North Carolina) to $3380 and $3206 respectively (or 5.4%) (South Carolina)

State Spending on Child Care:

Georgia is seventh in the relative difference between the annual income required by federal and state authorities for eligibility for subsidized child care with respective values at $34,929 and $24,278 (30.5%) in 1999; no national value available; range is from $33,539 and $17,062 respectively (or 49.1%) (South Carolina) to $29,882 and $29,580 respectively (or 1%) (Louisiana)

Georgia is seventh in the percent of children who are served through child care subsidies at 8% (along with Florida, South Carolina, and Virginia) in 1999; national value is 12%; range is from 18 (Tennessee) to 6 (Arkansas)

Georgia is third in the maximum co-payment a family of three with two children (one infant and one four-year-old in center-based child care at 13% in 2000; no national values; range is from 20% (Louisiana) to 4% (South Carolina)

Cost of Child Care:

Georgia is sixth in average annual tuition for child care in child care centers at $4576 for twelve-month-olds and $3900 for four-year-olds in 1997; no national value; range is from $9854 and $7119 (Massachusetts) to $3318 and $3276 (Kentucky) respectively

Georgia is sixth in average annual tuition for child care by family child care providers at $3900 for twelve-month-olds and $3380 for four-year-olds in 1997; no national value available; range is from $7380 and $7116 (Massachusetts) to $2210 and $2080 respectively (Mississippi)

Georgia is fourth in cost of high quality child care to a family with an infant and a four-year-old child in child care as compared to the average annual income of that family at 40% (with Florida and North Carolina) in 1997; no national value available; range is from 79% (Massachusetts) to 31% (Kentucky, Louisiana, and Mississippi)

Measures of Child Care Quality:

Georgia exceeds the NAEYC recommended maximum ratio of children to staff members of 4 to 1 for nine-month-olds at 6 to 1 in 1998 (along with Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and South Carolina); no national value available; range is from 6 (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and South Carolina) to 3 to 1 (Massachusetts)

Georgia exceeds the NAEYC recommended maximum ratio of staff to children of 7 to 1 for twenty-seven-month-olds at 10 to 1 in 1998 (along with Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia); no national value available; range is 12 to 1 (Arkansas and Mississippi) to 4 to 1 (Massachusetts)

Measures of Child Care Quality (Continued):

Georgia exceeds the NAEYC recommended ratio of staff to children of 10 to 1 for four-year-olds at 18 to 1 in 1998; no national value available; range is from 20 to 1 (Alabama and Florida) to 10 to 1 (Massachusetts and Washington)

Georgia is fifth in median hourly wage for child care workers at $6.49 (along with Virginia) in 1999; national value is $6.91; range is from $8.93 (Massachusetts) to $5.94 (Mississippi)

Georgia is eighth in mean annual salary of teacher assistants at $14,700 in 1999; national value is $17,400; range is from $20,710 (Washington) to $12,800 (Mississippi)

Georgia is third in the median hourly wage of preschool teachers at $8.18; national value is $8.14 in 1999; ranges is from $10.84 (Massachusetts) to $6.55 (Alabama)

Georgia is third in caseloads of child care setting inspectors at 229 per individual in 2000; no national value available; range is from 276 (Alabama) to 71 (Tennessee)

Georgia is fourth in number of on-going educational hours required of child care teachers at 10 (with Arkansas, South Carolina and Washington) in 2000; no national value available; range is from 20 (Massachusetts and North Carolina) to 0 (Louisiana).

Georgia is fourth in the number of on-going educational hours required of child care center directors at 10 in 2000; no national value available; range is from 20 (Massachusetts and North Carolina) to 0 (Louisiana and Virginia)

Georgia is ninth in the rate of turnover of child care staff members at 20% in 1998; no national value available; range is from 44% (North Carolina) to 18% (Alabama)

Sources of Data:

Administration for Children and Families (hhtp://www.acf/dhhs.gov)

Center for Career Development in Early Child Care and Education at Wheelock College (now known as the Institute for Leadership and Career Initiative) (hhtp://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/ccdece/institute.html)

Children's Defense Fund (hhtp://www.childrensdefense.org)

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (hhtp://www.naeyc.org)

National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) (http://cpmcnet.comlumbia.edu/dept/nccp)

Occupational Employment Statistics (hhtp://stats.bls.gov)

The Southern Institute for Children and Families (hhtp://www.kidsouth.org)

U.S Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (http://www.census.gov)

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[i] Adams, G. and Schulman, K. May 1998. *The South: Child Care Challenges.* Children's Defense Fund: Washington, D.C.

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